

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DHA-02 NSC-05 NSCE-00 SS-14 SSO-00
INR-05 INRE-00 CIAE-00 SP-02 PRS-01 /036 W
-----105587 182150Z /66
O 182103Z JUL 77
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1394

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 5303

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, AR, PDIP
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS IMPROVEMENTS IN ARGENTINA

LIMDIS

REF: STATE 162292

1. ALL OF US HERE WHO HAVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR NOTING ARGENTINE PROGRESS IN HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVANCE, AND THOSE IN MISSION WHO HAVE THE BEST MEANS OF OBSERVING THE ARGENTINE WAR AGAINST THE GUERRILLA MOVEMENT, HAVE GIVEN CAREFUL CONSIDERATION TO REFTEL AND TO POSSIBLE EFFECTS SOME STATEMENT OF PRESIDENTIAL INTEREST AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF IMPROVEMENT HERE MIGHT HAVE. WE CONCLUDE THAT AN INITIATIVE INVOKING THE PRESIDENT'S NAME WOULD NOT BE ADVISABLE AT THIS TIME. THIS COURSE IS, HOWEVER, ONE WE MAY WANT TO TAKE IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE.

2. WE AGREE THERE ARE ENCOURAGING SIGNS IN FACT THAT HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS, AND ARGENTINE EXCESSES IN THE WAR AGAINST TERRORISM HAVE DIMINISHED. IT IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO COMMENT ON A SIGNIFICANT SAMPLING OF THE 342 NAMES LISTED RECENTLY AS THOSE OF PERSONS RELEASED FROM CUSTODY HERE AND CITED BY REFTEL. WE CAN POINT, HOWEVER, TO KNOWLEDGE THAT THREE PRESONS ON THIS LIST HAVE IN FACT GAINED THEIR FREEDOM. WHAT INTERESTS US EQUALLY IS FACT THAT THERE IS INCREASING OFFICIAL RECOGNITION
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THAT HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES HAVE OCCURRED. AS WAR AGAINST TERRORISM WINDS DOWN, IT APPEARS TO US THAT THERE IS BETTER CONTROL BY THE GOVERNMENT OF THOSE OF ITS OWN FORCES WAGING THE WAR. WE FURTHER BELIEVE THAT GENERAL VIDELA AND HIS MODERATE MILITARY COLLEAGUES ARE GAINING INFLUENCE IN THE LONGER AND LARGER QUESTION OF WHO ULTIMATELY WILL RULE IN ARGENTINA. (SEE BUENOS AIRES 5281)

3. ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE IS MUCH THAT DISTURBS US. DIS-
APPEARANCE OF EIGHT PERSONS FROM MAR DEL PLATA, ALL LAWYERS OR
WIVES OF LAWYERS, IS A BROODING SCANDAL WHICH DAILY ATTRACTS MORE
ATTENTION HERE. OVER WEEKEND EMBASSY WAS GIVEN NEW INFORMATION
CONCERNING HARASSMENT BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS OF RANKING UNION
MEMBERS. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NO FIRM DATA ON THIS, WE CREDIT STORIES
TO EFFECT THAT AT LEAST FIVE LABOR UNION LEADERS HAVE BEEN
THREATENED WITH HARM UNLESS THEY PULL OUT OF LABOR AFFAIRS
AND, ACCORDING TO ONE SOURCE, LEAVE THIS COUNTRY. THE GRAIVER
AFFAIR APPEARS TO BE HEADED TOWARD A RESOLUTION WHICH WE FEAR
WILL BE UNSETTLING FOR THOSE WATCHING HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRESS IN
ARGENTINA. "LA OPINION" FORMER EDITOR TIMMERMAN HAS, WE ARE TOLD,
BEEN RECENTLY TRANSFERRED TO LA PLATA WHERE HE IS AGAIN BEING
HELD INCOMMUNICADO AND AGAIN WE FEAR THE OUTCOME WILL BE DISTRESS-
ING.

4. ALL THIS LEADS US TO HESITATE IN USING A PRESIDENTIAL
ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF AN IMPROVING SITUATION, LEST SUBSEQUENTLY
WE DISCOVER THAT HUMAN RIGHTS GAINS HERE WERE ILLUSORY. CHARGE
WILL BE SEEING MINISTER OF ECONOMY MARTINEZ DE HOZ TO QUESTION
THE MINISTER WHAT ADVANCES IN HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVANCES ARE,
IN HIS OPINION, WORTH OUR TAKING NOTE OF AND REPORTING TO OUR
GOVERNMENT. CHARGE WILL AT THAT TIME TAKE NOTE OF SEVERAL "STRAWS
IN THE WIND" WHICH LEAD US TOWARD ENCOURAGEMENT.

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5. A DECISION ON ANY POSITIVE COMMENTS ON THE LOCAL HUMAN
RIGHTS SCENE SHOULD AWAIT THE REACTIONS OF THE MINISTER OF ECONOMY.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: HUMAN RIGHTS, PROGRESS REPORTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 18-Jul-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977BUENOS05303
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770256-0445
Format: TEL
From: BUENOS AIRES
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770748/aaaabpof.tel
Line Count: 97
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: e3e9356a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 STATE 162292
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15-Nov-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1833910
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: HUMAN RIGHTS IMPROVEMENTS IN ARGENTINA LIMDIS
TAGS: SHUM, PDIP, AR
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/e3e9356a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009